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ABSTRACT

An analysis is provided of the governance system of the California community colleges based on a case study of one example of decision making. First, background information is provided on the history of the California community college system, with particular focus on state and local decision-making processes. The next sections address the question of whether the current state of community colleges governance can better be described as "organized anarchy," which is characterized by ambiguous goals, ambiguous participation, and unclear technology; or as "ultra-stable," which is characterized by clear goals, clear participation, ambiguous outcomes, and clear technology. Next, a description is provided of the decision-making process used by the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges to respond to a $30 million defunding. An analysis is then presented of the relative ambiguity of the goals, the level of participation, the ambiguity of the technology, and the clarity of the outcomes reflected in the process and results. While cautioning that the case study only provides a narrow insight into decision making in the system, the concluding section indicates that the process fit the criteria for "ultra stable" better than for "organized anarchy," in that goals were very specific, the Board of Governors as sole participant in the decision-making process clarified participation, and the course classification system and computer models utilized comprised a very specific technology. (AYC)

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE GOVERNANCE

FISH OR FOWL ?

by

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Presented to

Dr. Carol Mock

December 14, 1983

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The California junior colleges were created by the legislature in 1910. Permissive legislation provided for a minimum of political intervention and ensured local autonomy by providing for a locally elected lay board to govern each district. During the time until 1930, the colleges served as an extension of high school, opened post-secondary educational opportunities to the poor and students not ready for universities.

Between 1930 and 1950 the emphasis was a comprehensive curriculum (with strong transfer emphasis) provided to a largely traditional student population. The junior college function was emphasized and the open door policy was confirmed.

In the period between 1950 and 1970 the junior college gave way to the community college concept. Enrollments and number of campuses grew, extended day, vocational education, outreach to disadvantaged and adults all increased. There was great support for local control.

In the time between 1970 and 1980 the colleges faced some of the most significant changes of their entire history. Growth accelerated, nontraditional, part-time, and reverse transfer students gained prominence. The mission exploded; there was something for everybody and everybody was welcome. Funding changes began to shift authority toward the State.

The Board of Governors for California Community Colleges was created by an act of the California Legislature in 1967. Prior

to that time, State-level responsibility for community colleges was exercised by the Bureau of Junior Colleges within the State Department of Education. Legislative intent for the Board of Governors was set forth in Section 71023 of the Education Code. This Section states:

> It is the intent of the Legislature that the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges shall provide leadership and direction in the continuing development of community colleges as an integral and effective element in the structure of public higher education in the state. The work of the board shall at all times be directed to maintaining and continuing, to the maximum degree permissible, local autonomy and control in the administration of the community colleges.

In 1969 the Legislature enacted statutes more specifically delineating the functions of the Board of Governors and the locally elected governing boards. However, the language has proven to be unclear, lacked thorough conceptual analysis, and description, has not always been honored by the Legislature itself, and has been rendered essentially inoperative by numerous uncoordinated changes over the years.

In recent times revenue declines and limits, growth incentives and disencentives, collective bargaining, and the passage of Proposition 13 all contributed to destabilization of the State and local level decision-making processes. The direct and indirect consequences of Proposition 13 constitutes the most rapid and powerful series of shocks and aftershocks to affect the basic structure of the colleges in their 68-year history. The resultant shift of financial control from the local level to the State has created profound tensions in the relationship between local and

State governing boards. The local boards sense the increasing intrusions of central State government which challenges the planning needs of the community colleges and their flexibility to meet local education needs. The Board of Governors has been pressured by an aggressive, inquisitive, powerful legislature and Governor, as well as their support agencies who deal with isolated problems through State laws.

Problem

The current problem of governance facing the colleges is easier to understand in light of the historical changes. When established, the colleges were entirely under local control. As time has gone on, the State has become more and more of an influence on the college decision-making processes. Advocates of local control point out that the strength of the colleges is embodied in their diversity, while State control proponents point out the need for equity, which a State system would ensure.

To better understand the current state of community college governance, this paper will attempt to clarify the state of decision-making by examining the question: "Can the current state of community college governance be better described as an organized anarchy or an ultra-stable system?"

James March (Sproull, et al., 1978) contends in the forward to "Organizing an Anarchy" that interesting insights into the decision-making process of organizations can be developed by careful case studies. This paper will examine one such case of decision-making which has had great impact on the curriculum of community colleges. In 1982, the Legislature cut the community

colleges' budget by $30 million, and allowed the Board of Governors to determine where the money would come from to offset this "defunding." The year and a half of activity which insued presents an example of the current decision-making process in the community colleges of California.

Two Descriptions of Organizational Decision-Making

Organized Anarchy

The term "organized anarchy" was first applied to academic organizations by Cohen and March in 1974. They characterized this system as one with little central coordination or control. They point out that organized anarchy is characterized by many groups, each making individual decisions with neither coordination nor control being practiced. The "decisions" of the system are a consequence produced by the system but intended by no one and decisively controlled by no one. (Cohen and March, 1974). Leaders are relatively weak and decisions are made by individual action. Decisions are often by-products of unintended and unplanned activity. Organized anarchy implies a situation characterized by confusion and conflict, however, it suggests a looser more fluid kind of organization in contrast to a bureaucracy.

Baldridge, et al. (page 12), have produced the following characteristics to define academic organizations as organized anarchies:

> They have ambiguous goals that are often strongly contested. They serve clients who demand a voice in the decision-making process. They have a problematic technology for in order to serve clients their technology must be holistic and adaptable to individual

> needs. They are professionalized organizations in which employees demand a large measure of control over institutional decision processes. Finally, they are becoming more and more vulnerable to their environments. (Baldridge, et al., 1977).

Cohen and March (1974) presented a different list of characteristics. They agree with ambiguous goals and unclear technology, but in addition, include fluid or unclear participation.

Ultra-stable

The ultra-stable system of governance of academic organizations has been described by Carol Mock (1983). A brief diagram (1) illustrates the component parts of this model. Every organization must respond to disturbances. These disturbances offer the organization the opportunity to make decisions and change the environment. Environmental changes may be very simple and have little effect on the goals of the organization. However, when the environmental change substantially alters the goals then the decision is subjected to veto by groups within the organization. This veto is then sent back to the authority body and the decision is reconsidered and/or modified. This process continues until all vetoes are eliminated. The leadership is relatively weak, but has major influence upon the authority body. As described, this process is a trial and error governance system. When disturbances are applied, responses are generated until all constituencies are in basic agreement or are so exhausted that they cannot continue to veto. The outcomes are unclear since it is a trial and error method. It is not possible to predict the end product since there is a large amount of input from concerned groups.

Diagram 2 illustrates the community colleges as an ultra-stable system. Major disturbances are exerted by the Legislature, local needs, etc. The authority component is the Board of Governors and the Chancellor exerts the leadership. The veto component in community colleges is probably the most complex element of the entire system. Local boards, Academic Senate, administrative groups, collective bargaining organizations, special interest groups, and the general public all at one time or another have the ability to express vetoes. This is what gives the apparent complexity and ambiguity to the governance of community colleges.

Summary

To answer the question of "Is community college governance best described as an organized anarchy or ultra-stable system?" the following distinguishing criteria will be utilized in examining the decisions reached in response to the $30 million "defunding." Organized anarchy will be characterized by (1) ambiguous goals, (2) ambiguous participation, and (3) unclear technology. Ultra-stable will utilize characteristics of (1) clear goals, (2) clear participation, (3) ambiguous outcomes, and (4) clear technology.

Diagram 1: Generalized Model of Ultra-stable System

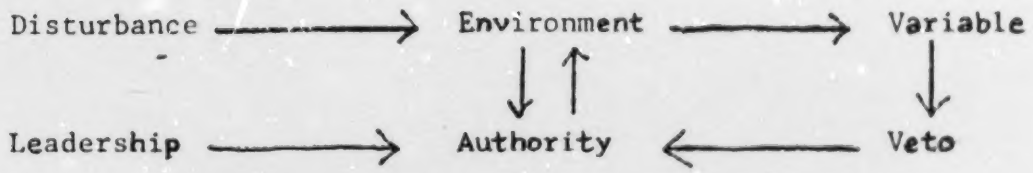
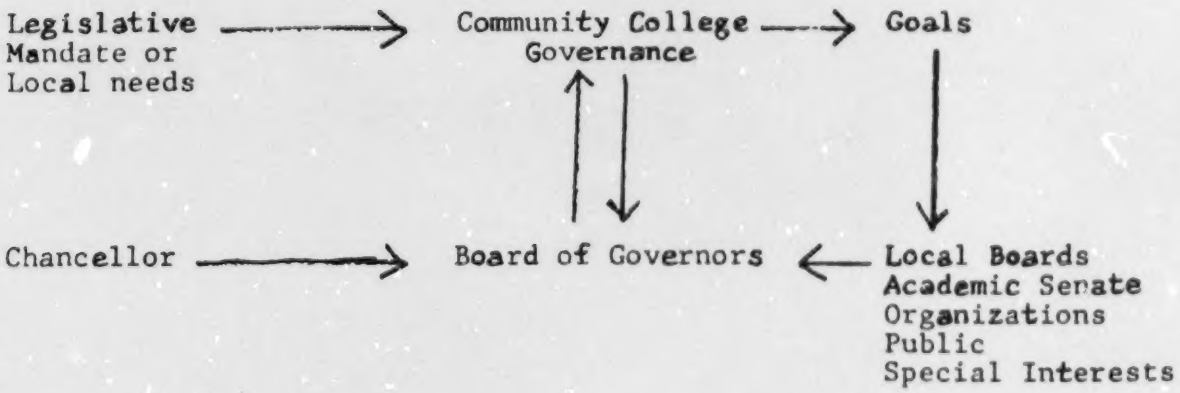


Diagram 2: Community College Model of Ultra-stable System



DECISION PROCESS

California community colleges were required by the Legislature to reduce their budgets by a total of $30 million in fiscal year 1982-83 through lessening or removing State support for courses of lower public priority. Because of this Legislative mandate, the Board of Governors, for the first time in history, directed the 70 California community college districts to stop offering certain subjects as credit or State-supported noncredit courses. Districts had the option of moving such courses to the fee-supported community services category.

Several criteria were employed in determining which courses should be included on a preliminary list of courses that would be shifted to community services in order to achieve the required $30 million reduction. They were as follows:

*Courses which fall within the meaning of the proposed language of the budget bill which expresses legislative intent. ("Avocational, recreational, and personal development")

*Courses which do not appear to assist the community colleges in fulfilling their mission described in the Master Plan for Higher Education

*Courses in which students enroll for significantly greater private than public interest and also which appear to have been designed to serve private sector rather than public interest.

*Self-help, avocational, and recreational courses which are not a required component of an academic or vocational program which has been approved by the Chancellor's Office.

*Courses the deletion of which will not inhibit a college's response to the needs of local business and industry

*Courses in which students, other than regular students, might enroll for self-help, avocational, or recreational purposes and which should be offered on a fee basis.

After adoption of the criteria, a preliminary list was prepared by the Chancellor's staff and reviewed by the organizations. The list was released to the field for extensive review and input. As work continued on the list, it was increased in an attempt to reach the required $30 million reduction. The list was released to the field in June 1982 and was adopted by the Board of Governors in July 1982. One major change that occurred in the list between June and July was in the area of Real Estate. Relicensure courses were dropped from the deletion list after a great outcry from the parties interested in this program.

The total Statewide deduction was calculated at $29,220,131 which was very close to the projected amount. The Statewide average loss in revenue as a result of the course deletion was 2.04 percent. However, some colleges were affected to a greater extent because of the number of deleted courses which were offered during 1981-82. Of the total Statewide savings, analysis indi-

cated that 53 percent was made in the subject areas of physical education and fine arts.

Some major difficulties were encountered as the implementation of the Legislative mandate was accomplished. The flexibility and rapidity with which the community colleges could meet emerging local needs has been inhibited. The decision of whether or not to offer some of the courses in the college curriculum was moved from the local level to the State. Because of the small number of marginal courses, it was necessary to include on the deletion list many courses traditionally offered by colleges and universities and which are currently offered for credit in the University of California and the California State University. (Chancellor's Office, 1982)

After the experience of creating and implementing a list of courses to be deleted, the Board of Governors has directed that a more detailed and carefully considered list of criteria identify courses which should be ineligible for State support. A broadly based Ad Hoc Committee was established to identify the issues and problems involved and to arrive at recommendations. The newly created policy was adopted in November of 1983.

ANALYSIS

The relative ambiguity of the goals, the level of participation, the ambiguity of the technology, and the clarity of the outcomes will be the three criteria used to determine whether the decision-making process used to respond to the $30 million defunding is better characterized as organized anarchy or ultrastable.

Goals

The ultimate goal of the Legislature was to reduce State apportionment to community colleges by $30 million. The second goal was to change the curriculum by reducing avocational, recreational, and personal development courses being offered to the students. Both of these goals were very specific and related to the community colleges by way of the budget bill (AB21, 1982). These goals were transferred to the community colleges and the Board of Governors embraced them in their response.

The overall goals of the colleges seem to be clarified by this process. A certain amount of 1981-82 workload was eliminated from the mission.

Technology

The major tool used to develop the list of courses to be defunded was the course classification system which had been required by the Legislature to help determine the difference between credit and noncredit courses. In addition, a classification system was established for all courses offered by community colleges. The final report included 100,000 credit and noncredit courses and over 6,000 community services classes. The report showed that 52 percent of the total student contact hours were in courses classified as liberal arts and sciences for baccalaureate degrees, 35 percent of the total were in occupational courses, and about 19 percent of the student contact hours were generated in physical education and fine and applied arts.

The data derived from the course classification system along with schedules provided by districts were the major sources of

information used to make the decisions as to which courses showed up on the defunded list.

Participation

The Legislation required the Board of Governors to identify the specific courses to be removed from State support. This assignment was completed with a great deal of participation. The Chancellor's Office provided the major data input. The Chancellor's Advisory Committee (made up of representatives of major college organizations) was consulted extensively and given the opportunity to modify the list. Major organizations, local boards of Trustees and administrators were given the opportunity to review the document in progress and make recommendations. Extensive public testimony was heard by the Board before the final vote was taken. In addition, after final action districts were able to petition to reinstate courses deleted.

Outcomes

To a certain degree the outcome of this decision was very predictable. However, certain courses, particularly the inclusion of Real Estate on the list, were suprising after all of the deliberations concerned with this decision. It is doubtful that even the Legislature would have envisioned a decision that would eliminate courses from State support which receive such support in the UC and CSU systems.

CONCLUSION

When drawing conclusions from the case presented in this paper, a great danger exists in that generalizations reached may not be valid for the regular governance mechanisms for California community colleges. This specific case can only yield a very narrow insight into the total decision-making process.

From the analysis previously presented, it can be concluded that the decision-making process exhibited does not fit the criteria for organized anarchy. The goals, which were used for making the decision were very clear, the Board of Governors as sole participants clarified the participation, the course classification system and computer models were utilized and made for a very specific technology.

The ultra-stable system is a much better model for describing the process consisered in this paper. The disturbance was clearly the Legislative intent, the authority the Board of Governors, and the environmental changes were clear. The only part which does not fit is the veto aspect. In this case vetoes were eliminated before the final decision was made. The groups which might exert a veto were consulted before hand and either had an impact on the outcome or were told their concerns could not be addressed. After the decision was made there was very little chance to veto inclusion of any course on the list even though a reinstatement process was utilized. The decision was very firm.

Examining this case has generated some specific observations. This case may be the unusual situation in community college governance. The mandate was very clear and a specific guideline

was imposed on the system. This is not the regular situation. Second, this process of trying to reach consensus of the veto group before deciding ensures that the difficult issues are never addressed. If only issues which are agreed to in advance are considered someone else (the Legislature) will continue to make the difficult decisions.

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